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and Dr Dawn Collins

# **COSMOLOGY, MAGIC AND DIVINATION 2021**

(HPCA7013)

## **Seminar 1: Introduction to the Module**



# Aims of the Module

To:

- introduce students to the theory and practice of magic and divination as understood within the context of ancient Greek and Roman ritual and religious traditions
- locate such practices within classical and Hellenistic cosmology and the development of astrology
- explore the wider context of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern divination and magic
- consider the legacy of Hellenistic and Classical divinatory and magical practices in post-Classical culture, especially in Late Antiquity
- introduce students to oracles and divination in ancient Tibet
- consider the anthropological topics and themes that can be applied to ancient divinatory practices

# Learning Outcomes of the Module

By the end of this module successful students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the theory of magic and divination.
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of cosmological frameworks in the Classical and Hellenistic worlds, especially the notion of individual participation in cosmic processes, and their legacy in the Near East.
- Display an advanced awareness of current academic debates on ancient divination and magic, and critical evaluation of scholarly theories.
- Critically interpret the emergence of classical astrology, its nature and function, within a religious and divinatory context.
- Demonstrate a working knowledge of ancient Tibetan oracles and divination.
- Be able to apply theories and practices of anthropology to ancient divination and its practices.

# Essential Reading

- Addey, Crystal. *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism: Oracles of the Gods*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014 (available from TSD Library as an e-book)
- Betz, Hans Dieter, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992. (1<sup>st</sup> edition available at archive.org)
- Champion, Nicholas, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 1, The Ancient and Classical Worlds, London: Continuum, 2008. (available from TSD Library as an e-book)
- Flower, Michael Attyah, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. (available from Ebscohost ebook collection)
- Greenbaum, Dorian Gieseler, *The Daimon in Hellenistic Astrology: Origins and Influences*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015 (available from TSD Library as an e-book)
- Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries (De mysteriis)*: Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and J.P. Hershbell (eds.), Iamblichus: *On the Mysteries*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003 (available paperback for ca. £33)
- Ogden, D., *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. (available from UWTSD database EBSCOhost)

# Course Schedule

- **Week 1:** Introduction; Cicero's *On Divination* (*De Divinatione*) and Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* (*De mysteriis*)
- **Week 2:** Divination in Egypt and the Near East
- **Week 3:** Divination, Magic and Religion
- **Week 4:** Magic, Theurgy and Philosophy in the Graeco-Roman World
- **Week 5:** Divination and Oracles in Ancient Greece
- **Week 6:** Hellenistic Astrology and its Place within Divinatory Practice
- **Week 7:** Divination and Oracles in Ancient Tibet
- **Week 8:** Divination, Oracles and Astrology in Ancient Greece
- **Week 9:** Magic, Medicine, Religion and Divination in Ancient Greece
- **Week 10:** Anthropological Perspectives on Divination and Magic

# Course Schedule

- Keep up with the weekly reading listed in the bibliography in the Course Handbook (p.7 onwards); read recommended reading both before and after the relevant seminars
- Read the weekly lecture notes, handouts and slides on Moodle
- If you have any queries or questions:
- Email Dorian ([d.greenbaum@uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:d.greenbaum@uwtsd.ac.uk)), Crystal ([crystal.addey@ucc.ie](mailto:crystal.addey@ucc.ie)) or Dawn ([d.collins@uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:d.collins@uwtsd.ac.uk))
- The Oracle Cafe is also open!

# Cosmology, Magic and Divination: Zoom Seminar Schedule (all times London/UK time 1700-1900)

- **Week 1: Seminar 1: Tuesday 9 February 2021, 5-7 pm**  
Dr Dorian Greenbaum  
*Introduction to the Module and Writing your Critical Review*  
*Introduction to Cicero's On Divination, Iamblichus's On the Mysteries*
- **Week 2: Seminar 2: Tuesday 16 February 2021, 5-7 pm**  
Dr Dorian Greenbaum  
*Ancient Divination in Egypt and the Near East*
- **Week 3: Seminar 3: Tuesday 23 February 2021, 5-7 pm**  
Dr Dorian Greenbaum  
*Divination, Magic and Religion in Antiquity*
- **Week 4: Seminar 4: Tuesday 2 March 2021, 5-7 pm**  
Dr Crystal Addey  
*Theurgy, Magic and Philosophy in the Graeco-Roman World*

# Cosmology, Magic and Divination: Zoom Seminar Schedule (continued)

- **No seminar on Tuesday 9 March 2021**  
**(READING WEEK)**

- **Week 5: Seminar 5: Tuesday 16 March 2021, 5-7pm**

Dr Crystal Addey

*Divination and Oracles in Ancient Greece*

- **Week 6: Seminar 6: Tuesday 23 March 2021, 5-7pm**

Dr Dorian Greenbaum

*Hellenistic Astrology and its Place within Divinatory Practice*

- **Week 7: Seminar 7: Tuesday 30 March 2021, 5-7pm**

Dr Dawn Collins

*Divination and Oracles in Ancient Tibet*

- **No seminar on Tuesday 6 April 2021**  
**(READING WEEK)**

# Cosmology, Magic and Divination: Zoom Seminar Schedule (continued)

- **Week 8: Seminar 8: Tuesday 13 April 2021, 5-7 pm**

Dr Crystal Addey, Dr Dorian Greenbaum

*Divination, Oracles and Astrology in Ancient Greece*

- **Week 9: Seminar 9: Tuesday 20 April 2021, 5-7 pm**

Dr Dorian Greenbaum

*Magic, Medicine, Religion and Divination in Ancient Greece*

- **Week 10: Seminar 10: Monday 27 April 2021, 5-7 pm**

Dr Dawn Collins

*Anthropological Perspectives on Divination and Magic*

# Assignment 1: Critical Review

- **Assignment 1: Critical Review: Analysis of a Primary Source Document**
- **One 2,250 word assignment (40% of marks).  
Write:**
- **A Critical Review of Cicero's Arguments against divination in *De Divinatione* (*On Divination*)  
(use the Loeb edition of Cicero's *De Divinatione* available through UWTSD database: Loeb Classical Library)**

**OR**

- **A Critical Review of Iamblichus' Arguments for Divination in *De Mysteriis* (*On the Mysteries*)  
(use the translation by Emma Clarke, John Dillon and Jackson Hershbell 2003 if possible; if not, the translation by Thomas Taylor)**

# Assignment 1: Critical Review

- **Assignment 1 Due Dates:**
- **Completion: Monday 15 March 2021**
- **Final date for Submission: Monday 22 March 2021, 23:59**



Image above: Cicero, Bust in the Capitoline Museum, Rome, 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE (GNU Free Documentation License, Wikimedia Commons.) Image below: Iamblichus From the oldest manuscript of De mysteriis liber (Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain image)

# Assignment 1: Writing your critical review

- **Read the ancient source first**: it is important to read Cicero's *De Divinatione* (Books 1 and 2) or Iamblichus's *De mysteriis* before you start.
- Make notes on the ancient source.
- Then read secondary sources (the modern works of scholars) on these works.
- Why?
  - The importance of examining the evidence directly
  - The importance of developing your own views
  - The importance of critical analysis

# Assignment 1: Writing your critical review

- Introduction:
- What is the source?
- Who created the source?
- When was the source created?
- Where was the source created?
- Why was the source created?
- Introduce Cicero or Iamblichus, their work and their historical and religious contexts.

# Assignment 1: Writing your critical review

- What arguments are given for or against divination?
- What context do these arguments occur within? Hint: think about the dialogue form in each case. Why might dialogue be used? How important is the literary form? How does the use of dialogue relate to philosophy and to religious practices?
- Read modern scholarly works on these ancient texts.
- Include plenty of references (citations) and examples to support and illustrate your points.

# Assignment 2: Essay

- **One 5,250 word essay (60% of marks) on one of the following topics (essay titles listed on next slide).**
- **Assignment 2 Due Dates:**
- **Completion: Monday 3 May 2021**
- **Final date for Submission: Monday 10 May 2021, 23:59**

# Assignment 2 Essay Titles

- 1. Analyse the roles of, and relationship between, cosmology and divination in **ONE** of the following:
  - Ancient Egypt
  - Ancient Mesopotamia
  - Hellenistic astrology
- 2. Critically analyse a text from the Greek or Demotic Magical Papyri in terms of its cosmology, magic and divination.
- 3. Critically examine the roles of divination within theurgy.
- 4. Analyse the connections between theurgy, philosophy and magic.
- 5. Analyse the role of divination within the theory and practice of ancient Greek medicine.
- 6. Can the theory and practice of divination help distinguish between magic and religion?
- 7. What relevance do anthropological theories and observations have to the study of divination and magic in antiquity?
- 8. Explain how the insights regarding science and knowledge gained by Evans-Pritchard in his anthropological fieldwork among the Azande can assist us in our study of divination and religion in the ancient Graeco-Roman world.

# Week 1 Student Activity

- This course is going to introduce you to ancient divination, magic and cosmology. Of course you are not expected to know all about these topics before taking this module.
- But as an exercise before the module begins, think about your conception of divination right now. (You don't need to Google it – this is an exercise in your impressions.) How would you define it? Do you think it is real? Do you think it still exists? Have you ever practised divination?

# Task for Seminar 2 (Monday 4 May 2020): *Ancient Divination in Egypt and the Near East*

## Personal Dream Interpretation

Everyone dreams, and this week one of our discussion topics will be dreams and divination. We are asking a volunteer to record a dream and analyse it. What is the content of the dream? What do you think it means? Can you apply it to your life? The dream does not need to be 'prophetic' – the idea is to think about your personal experience of dreaming, and be able to relate it to ancient records of dreaming.

# Ancient Mediterranean Religions: Egypt, the Near East, Greece and Rome

- Polytheistic and pagan: involving worshipping and honouring many gods, goddesses and divine beings
- Mythological
- Mystery cults: optional. Initiation.
- ‘Embedded’ within everyday life (no Greek word for ‘religion’; Roman *religio*)
- No dogma or orthodoxy but systematic use of divination
- Orthopraxy: Action rather than belief? But shared worldview and sense of meaning and efficacy.

# Cicero's *On Divination* (*De divinatione*)

- Text available Loeb Classical Library database at UWTSD
- Bill Thayer has transcribed the English of the Loeb edition here:
- [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de\\_Divinatione/home.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de_Divinatione/home.html)
- The Perseus site at Tufts has the Falconer translation here:
- <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0043%3Abook%3D1%3Asection%3D1> This can be toggled to see the Latin original.

# Cicero

- Marcus Tullius Cicero: orator, philosopher, politician and augur at the end of the Roman Republic.
- Born 3 January 106 BCE, probably at Arpinum, Latium (now Arpino, Italy); murdered 7 December 43 BCE at Formio
- Consulted the oracle at Delphi:  
‘...when he asked the god at Delphi how he might become most renowned, the Pythia enjoined him to make his own nature, and not the opinion of the masses, the guide of his life.’ (my trans. based on Perrin)
- Became a lawyer, and orator and a politician; also appointed to the college of augurs in Rome
- Wrote prolifically, including books of his orations, philosophical treatises and letters
- *On Divination*: written in Latin around 45 BCE to supplement his work *On the Nature of the Gods* (*De Natura Deorum*)

# Cicero's *On Divination* (*De divinatione*)

*On Divination*: written in Latin around 45 BC to supplement his work *On the Nature of the Gods* (*De Natura Deorum*)

- Characters: Marcus Cicero and his brother Quintus Cicero
- Purpose: Philosophical dialogue about divination
  - Book 1: Quintus argues for divination
  - Book 2: Marcus argues against divination
  - Why use the dialogue form and give *pro* and *contra* arguments?
  - The philosophical context

# *Dialogue as a literary form*

- Came into being with Plato ('Socratic Dialogue')
- Also used by Xenophon, Aristotle, Plutarch, Porphyry and Iamblichus
- Effective as a teaching strategy
- 'dramatize[s] inquiry'\*
- Often uses the technique of questions and answers; makes us pay attention to the relationship between questions and answers
- Excellent for exploring a topic in depth
- Forces consideration of more than one side of an argument
- Demands interpretation by the reader
- R. Lamberton, *Plutarch*, New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2001, p. 26
- <http://greecepodcast.com/episode16.html> (MM McCabe podcast on Platonic dialogue)

# Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*

- Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, translated by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and J.P. Hershbell, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.
- Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries and Life of Pythagoras*, translated by Thomas Taylor, Dorset: Prometheus Trust, 2003 (available from Prometheus Trust with 20% discount for £13.60 (paperback) or £18.40 (Hardback): see [www.prometheustrust.co.uk](http://www.prometheustrust.co.uk))
- Thomas Taylor translation also available online (Section 3 = Book 3):  
<http://www.archive.org/stream/iamblichusonmys00taylgoog#page/n9/mode/1up>



# Late Antiquity: Intellectual, religious and cultural contexts

- Greek and Egyptian ‘syncretism’
- Blending and intertwining of Mediterranean cultures (partly through the political and social power of the Roman Empire)
- Prominent role of initiation in Egyptian, Greek and Roman mystery cults
- What about Iamblichus *De Mysteriis* and Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo*?

# Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*

- Original title: “The Reply of the Master Abamon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo, and the Solutions to the Questions it Contains.”
- Written under the guise of the Egyptian prophet Abamon as a reply to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*.
- The philosophical genre of Problems and Solutions.
- A series of replies to a set of problems proposed by Porphyry about the nature of the gods and proper ways of worshipping them.

# The debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus in the *Letter to Anebo* and *De Mystериis*

- Orthodox view: A hostile disagreement between Porphyry and Iamblichus. Porphyry launches a sceptical and scathing attack on theurgy and religious practices (following Plotinus' approach).
- Emma Clarke: “[The *Letter to Anebo* is] an epistle which launched a vicious attack on theurgy, more than likely aimed specifically at Iamblichus and his beliefs”; “It seems undeniable that the atmosphere between the *Letter* and *On the Mysteries* is manifestly hostile and betrays a considerable tension between the two philosophers.”

# The Exchange between Porphyry and Iamblichus as Dialogue

- The exchange between Porphyry and Iamblichus functions within two traditional genres of philosophy:
- The genre of ‘Problems and Solutions’:  
(Porphyry’s *Questions on Homer*; *Collection of Questions on Rhetoric*; Damascius’ *Problems and Solutions on First Principles*).
- The genre of philosophical dialogue:  
Platonic dialogue; ‘philosophy in action.’

# Dialogue in Neoplatonism

- Dialogue central to the teaching methods of the Neoplatonists.
- Once I, Porphyry, went on asking him [i.e. Plotinus] for three days about the soul's connection with the body, and he kept on explaining to me. A man called Thaumantias came in who was interested in general statements and said that he wanted to hear Plotinus speaking in the manner of a set treatise, but could not stand Porphyry's questions and answers. Plotinus said, "But if when Porphyry asks questions we do not solve his difficulties we shall not be able to say anything at all to put into the treatise." (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 13).

# Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*

- Not a scathing attack on religious practices, but a constructive, philosophical inquiry in the dialogue tradition, a philosophical questioning from master to pupil, or from philosopher to philosopher.
- Identity of Anebo: Iamblichus calls him his student. The letter is aimed at Anebo, a student of Iamblichus or Iamblichus himself.
- A deliberate attempt on Porphyry's part to establish a form of Platonic dialogue. Porphyry knew the answers to his questions, but acts as a philosophical teacher to 'draw out' the philosophical explanations from his pupil / fellow philosopher.

# Reassessing Porphyry

- Porphyry's interest in theurgy (lost commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles).
- Positive view of religion in *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On the Cave of the Nymphs*.
- Scholars: *Philosophy from Oracles* a credulous, superstitious work written early before he met Plotinus; *Letter to Anebo* a more 'rational' work written during or after his time with Plotinus (Joseph Bidez).
- This view has now been dismissed.
- Porphyry uses oracles in works written in his old age: the *Life of Plotinus* culminates in an oracle.

# The *Letter to Anebo*

- The sheer variety and broad spectrum of questions:

“Some questions, then, call for the clarification of issues which have been wrongly confused, while others concern the reason why various things are the way they are, and are thought of in such a way; others, again, draw one’s attention in both directions at once, since they contain an inherent contradiction; and still others call for an exposition of our whole mystical system. *This being the case, they are taken from many perspectives, and from very various branches of knowledge* [my italics]” (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 1.1 (4.5-9))

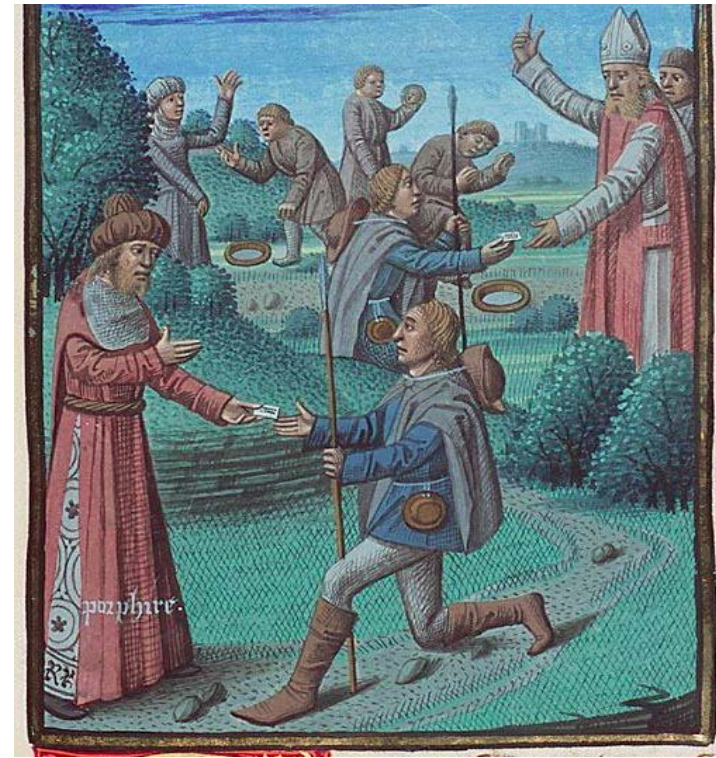


Image: Porphyry sending his letter to Anebo, and Anebo receiving it. No. 404, The Hague, Museum Meermano-Westreenianum, 10 A 11, fol. 439v.

# The Questions of the *Letter to Anebo*

- Porphyry: Is divination caused by deceptive *daimones*?
- “Moreover, there is an interpretation of the sacred operations even worse than this, attributing the cause of divination to “a certain kind of deceptive nature, both protean and versatile, which takes on the forms of gods, daemons, and ghosts of the dead”... In vain, then, do you introduce the opinion of the atheists that “all divination is accomplished by the evil daemon.” For such people do not deserve to be mentioned in discussions about the gods, and they are at the same time both ignorant of the distinction between truth and falsity, having been nurtured in the dark from the beginning, and not able to discern the principles from which these things come into being” (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 3.31 (175.12-176.1; 179.9-180.3))
- The Christian nature of this question; the “atheists.”



Image: Porphyry pointing out bad & deceptive *daimones*. No. 403, The Hague, Museum Meermano-Westreenianum, 10 A 11, fol. 437v.

# The Parallel between Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* and the *Hermetica*

- The possibility of a parallel between the exchange of Porphyry and Iamblichus and the philosophical writings of the *Hermetica*, many of which were written in dialogue form for the purpose of philosophical paideia:
- The Egyptian pseudonym adopted by Iamblichus.
- Similarities in structure: philosophical dialogue discussing metaphysical and religious phenomena.

Image: Ptolemy and Hermes confer. Silver plate with relief decoration, 500-600 CE. Open Content Program, J. Paul Getty Museum



# The Prologue of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*

“It is to him [i.e. Hermes] that our ancestors in particular dedicated the fruits of their wisdom, attributing all their own writings to Hermes. And if we, for our part, receive from this god our due share of favour, such as we are capable of receiving, you, for your part, do well in laying before the priests questions about theology, such as they love to deal with, and which pertain to their expertise; and, at the same time, assuming that the letter sent to my student Anebo may be addressed equally well to me, it is reasonable for me to grant you a true reply to your enquiries.” (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 1.1 (2.1-7))

- The divine patronage of Hermes: The status of himself as an exegete and his text as a *symbolon* in the chain of Hermes.
- The “Hermaic chain”: Porphyry, Proclus
- References to “the way of Hermes” and “the books of Hermes.”